
CHAPTER 5

OFFICE WORKER SAFETY

SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS, AND THOSE WHO OCCASIONALLY TRAVEL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5.00	INTRODUCTION
5.01	PURPOSE
5.02	POLICY STATEMENT
5.03	BACKGROUND
5.04	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH
	A. The supervisor's role
	B. The employee's role

PART 1. SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS

OFFICE SAFETY AND GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

5.10	Worksite safety inspections
5.11	Good housekeeping guidelines
5.12	Aisle and hallway widths
5.13	Electrical safety
5.14	Securing furniture and equipment
5.15	Material/office supply storage
5.16	Stairways
5.17	Exit signs
5.18	Door openings

**PART 2. SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS WHO
OCCASIONALLY TRAVEL****PREPARING FOR FIELD TRIPS**

- 5.20 Trip planning
- 5.21 Motel, hotel, dining out, and sightseeing safety
- 5.22 Personal clothing
- 5.23 Use of seat belts and shoulder harnesses
- 5.24 Visiting a construction or maintenance project

USING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

- 5.25 Head protection
- 5.26 Eye and face protection
- 5.27 Warning garments (vest, shirt, or jacket)
- 5.28 Foot protection

SPECIAL WORK ACTIVITIES

- 5.29 Parking and/or stopping along highways
- 5.30 Using physical barriers
- 5.31 Using a lookout
- 5.32 Working in median areas
- 5.33 Amber warning lights
- 5.34 Night work
- 5.35 Hazardous spills

CHAPTER 5

OFFICE WORKER SAFETY

SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS, AND THOSE WHO OCCASIONALLY TRAVEL

5.00 INTRODUCTION

Office workers can be divided into: employees who work in an office setting and do not travel, and employees who work in an office setting, and because of the nature of their work assignment, occasionally or routinely travel to other locations.

5.01 PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information about safety and health issues unique to office settings, and specific instructions for supervisors and employees who may occasionally or routinely leave their office and take field trips.

Because of the different working conditions between those who do not travel for or on their job and those who do, this chapter has been divided into two (2) parts as follows:

PART 1. SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICER WORKERS, covers office safety and good housekeeping.

PART 2. SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS WHO OCCASIONALLY TRAVEL, covers preparing for field trips, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and special work activities.

5.02 POLICY STATEMENT

Managers, supervisors, and employees shall do everything reasonably possible to maintain a safe and healthy work environment in all places of employment.

5.03 BACKGROUND

The policies, practices, and standards described in this chapter are based on a variety of regulations, including Cal-OSHA, Uniform Building Code (UBC) standards, or other cited authorities. Some of the requirements are based on Departmental policies as contained in Director's Policy statements, Deputy Directives, Department of General Services Management Memos, and/or the State Administrative Manual (SAM).

5.04 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH

A. The supervisor's role

It is Caltrans policy that supervisors are responsible for the safety and health of their employees and for ensuring that the work environment does not contribute to injury or illness.

To fulfill these responsibilities, supervisors are required to routinely conduct safety inspections and have regularly scheduled safety meetings with their employees to discuss safety and health issues.

Supervisors are responsible to enforce all safety and health policies, procedures and work practices. Whenever an employee violates a safety and health policy, law, regulation or rule, supervisors shall consider appropriate disciplinary action.

Supervisors will also discuss medical or other emergency situations and emergency procedures contained in their local Emergency Action Plan with their employees.

NOTE:

Supervisors are responsible to maintain a copy of the "Emergency Notification Information" form in their files for emergency information purposes.

The form provides space for the name of a family member or designated person to contact following an emergency, name of predesignated personal physician, and provides space to indicate (yes or no) that they may need special assistance during an emergency evacuation.

See Chapter 9 - FIRST AID AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT, Section 9.06 WHOM TO NOTIFY IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY for details.

The supervisor's safety and health responsibility applies to the office work setting, and if an employee is directed to leave his/her office, walk to another near-by office, or drive a motor vehicle to another city.

When the employee leaves his/her office and takes a field trip, the supervisor must discuss potential hazards before the trip begins. The use of personal protective equipment, including hard hats, safety glasses, warning garments, and foot protection, must also be explained.

B. The employee's role

All employees are expected to report to work mentally and physically capable of performing all of their assigned duties without jeopardizing the safety and health of themselves, other employees, or the public.

Employees shall be free from the effects of medication, controlled substances, alcohol, or the complications arising from illness or injury which might impair their judgement and/or ability to perform their work. Employees shall be able to perform his/her assigned duties in a safe manner.

Employees are responsible to do everything reasonably necessary to protect their own safety and health and that of others by complying with all occupational safety and health policies, procedures, laws, rules or regulations.

Employees shall promptly report all injuries, illnesses, or unsafe conditions to their supervisor immediately, or at least before the end of the work shift.

Employees are responsible to inform their supervisor of any changes in home address, medical condition, name of a family member or designated person to contact following an emergency, choice of predesignated personal physician, and should advise their supervisor that they may need assistance during an emergency evacuation.

NOTE:

Employees are responsible to update the information on their Emergency Notification Information form for emergency information purposes. They should also inform their supervisor if their physical or medical condition changes that would require them to need special assistance during an emergency evacuation.

PART 1. SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS

OFFICE SAFETY AND GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

The information in this section applies to all employees, but its primary focus is for supervisors and employees who work in an office setting and do not travel.

Office work areas are subject to several safety and health regulations contained in the General Industry Safety Orders (GISO), and the Electrical Safety Orders (ESO) of the Cal-OSHA regulations. Additionally, state offices are also subject to the requirements of the Uniform Building Code (UBC).

The information in PART 1. of this chapter represents some of the most frequently followed safety and health regulations applicable to office safety. Some of the information contained in this chapter has been condensed from other chapters of the manual. Where applicable, a cross reference has been noted.

5.10 Worksite safety inspections

Supervisors are responsible to identify, reduce and/or eliminate physical or environmental hazards that may contribute to injuries or illnesses. They should also routinely review and study their operating methods, practices, and procedures to reduce the potential for injury or illness.

Worksite inspections should be conducted as follows:

- **Informal inspections** - in the course of daily work to observe and correct immediately any unsafe condition or unsafe act. Written reports are not usually required.
- **Formal inspections** - walk-through inspections for the distinct purpose of identifying unsafe conditions or unsafe acts, and/or physical or environmental hazards, writing reports and scheduling dates for correction. Conducted at least annually at all fixed worksites.
- **Special inspections** - performed in response to reports of unsafe conditions or actions and to evaluate hazards or health risks that may be associated with new products, processes, or equipment with written report and dates for correction. These inspections usually take place when a supervisor asks for assistance in handling new activities or products, and/or whenever unsafe conditions or actions are reported.

See Chapter 3 - SAFETY INSPECTIONS for more detailed information and a sample office work area inspection checklist.

5.11 Good housekeeping guidelines

Offices, store-rooms, personal service rooms, hallways and passageways shall be kept clean, orderly and in a sanitary condition to the extent that the nature of the work allows. Office furniture and equipment should be laid out for efficiency, convenience, and safety.

All floors shall be free of dangerous projections or obstructions, maintained in good repair, dry or slip-resistant, and have no tripping hazards. Defective tiles or carpet are to be reported to the building maintenance staff and repaired.

- **Ergonomic standard**

Employees shall be provided with furniture and equipment that meets state standards. See Chapter 7 - ERGONOMICS for more details.

- **Moving furniture, equipment, or storage boxes**

Office furniture and equipment should not be moved by employees. Supervisors should arrange for professional movers by contacting the Building Manager or Facility Operations office in your District or other Caltrans facility.

- **Lifting of equipment, supplies, and other items**

There are no written standards to control the amount of weight that a person can lift without causing injury. Whenever any object is to be lifted, some discretion or judgement must be used. Employees should never lift anything that may cause injury. Always ask for assistance.

Storage boxes, monthly supplies, or containers with unknown or heavy contents should not be lifted without first inspecting the contents and then use proper lifting techniques.

See Chapter 7 - ERGONOMICS for information regarding proper lifting techniques.

5.12 Aisle and hallway widths

The minimum space requirements for aisles and hallways are based on the Cal-OSHA, General Industry Safety Orders (GISO) and the construction standards contained in the Uniform Building Code (UBC).

The minimum requirements for office areas are:

- **Within an office or work station, use: The 24" standard**

This standard requires unobstructed walking space between and around desks, chairs, book cases, file cabinets, credenzas, and other general office furniture or equipment, and/or walls partitions. The wall partitions may be portable or permanent.

- **In a hallway or walkway, use: The 44" standard**

The UBC has established a 44 inch minimum width for routes of travel by persons with disabilities.

The 44 inch standard applies to all types of hallways and walkways, e.g., used as egress and ingress to work areas or offices. These walkways may be main hallways of a building or they may be lateral hallways connecting work areas and/or offices. They may be between or adjacent to permanent or moveable wall partitions.

Designated hallways and walkways may be wider than 44 inches, but must have at least 44 inches of unobstructed walking space.

- **In common work areas, use The 44" standard**

The 44 inch standard is also required in the walking or standing space found in common work areas, such as in front of storage areas or equipment or copier machines, drinking fountains, file cabinets, kitchen areas, work tables for common use, and generally any work area that is used by various employees during a work shift.

5.13 Electrical safety

Office work areas are subject to the Cal-OSHA Electrical Safety Orders (ESO). The following represents some of the pertinent electrical safety standards.

Electrical power cords for computers, printers, or other electrical devices shall not be placed on the floor unprotected or where they may create a tripping hazard.

Electrical extension cords are permitted, but shall not be used as a substitute for fixed wiring. New electrical outlets should be installed to eliminate the need to use extension cords where possible.

When a telephone or electrical box on the floor is exposed the box should be marked as a hazard until the hazard is removed.

5.14 Securing furniture and equipment

In order to be prepared for emergencies such as earthquakes, certain office furniture and equipment should be secured to walls or floors.

The following guidelines should be followed when securing office furniture and equipment:

- File cabinets/storage cabinets, five (5) feet or shorter need not be secured to walls or floors.
- File cabinets/storage cabinets between five (5) feet and six (6) feet should be placed against permanent walls and be secured to the wall.
- If wall space is not available, file/storage cabinets between five (5) feet and six (6) feet may be placed in open areas, placed back-to-back and secured to each other, or the floor.
- File cabinets/storage cabinets, (6) feet or taller, shall be placed against permanent walls and secured to the wall.
- If wall space is not available, file/storage cabinets six (6) feet or taller may be placed in open areas, provided they are placed back-to-back and secured to each other and the floor.

5.15 Material/office supply storage

Office supplies should be stored in appropriate areas set aside for that purpose, and not where they will contribute to injury.

Do not:

1. Store materials on top of modular furniture overheads or cabinets.
2. Store materials above the level of your shoulders.
3. Place objects such as flower pots and vases on windowsills or ledges.
4. Place card index files, dictionaries, or other heavy objects on top of file cabinets greater than 5' tall..
5. Use storage boxes (cardboard boxes) as room dividers.
6. Use walkways, hallways, stairwells, and landings for storage.

Walkways and hallways should be maintained free of all obstructions or impediments for use in case of an emergency.

NOTE:

If materials (office supplies or records) have to be stored in card board boxes, they must be piled, stacked, or racked in a manner designed to prevent them from tipping, falling, collapsing, rolling, or spreading.

5.16 Stairways

All stair tread surfaces shall be slip-resistant. Stairways shall be maintained clear of tripping hazards and in good repair. Stairways shall have handrails on each side. Stairways shall not be used as storage areas.

5.17 Exit signs

Exit signs or directional signs, or both, shall be provided at every exit door, at the intersection of corridors, at exit stairways or ramps, and at other locations as necessary to inform occupants of the means of egress available.

Exit signs that are electrically illuminated shall be lighted with at least two electric lamps. Burnt out electric lamps shall be replaced in a timely manner.

5.18 Door openings

Door openings should be kept clear. Doors marked "Fire Door, Do Not Block," or other special notice should not be changed or altered.

Solid doors (without windows) can present hazards because they can be approached from both sides at the same time. Employees should be warned of this hazard and instructed to:

- a) approach solid doors slowly,
- b) stay out of the path of an opening door, and/or,
- c) reach for the door knob to avoid contact with the body and arms.

Doors that open onto a hallway or open directly into the path of on-coming foot traffic should be approached slowly. The swing radius of doors can be marked on the floor.

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PART 2. SAFETY AND HEALTH FOR OFFICE WORKERS WHO OCCASIONALLY TRAVEL

PREPARING FOR FIELD TRIPS

This information in this section applies to all employees, but its primary focus is for supervisors and employees who work in an office setting, and because of the nature of their work assignment, occasionally or routinely travel.

5.20 Trip planning

In preparation for a field trip (*) the supervisor shall discuss the following items with his/her employee(s) before the trip begins to:

1. Define the scope of work.
2. Identify the characteristics of the work area, facility, or highway, including such things as traffic volume, number of lanes, shoulder widths, possible sites for parking, fences, gates, etc.
3. Review the Code of Safe Work Practices (**) applicable to the work.
4. Discuss working on foot with the employee(s).
5. Assemble all safety equipment (PPE), materials, and other equipment that will be required to perform the work.
6. Arrange for transportation, remind employees to use seat belts and shoulder harnesses while in the vehicle.
7. Ensure that all materials are assembled and all potential hazards have been reviewed and discussed.
8. When arriving at the worksite, drive through the designated work area in the field to identify if any work is on-going, and meet with the supervisor in charge.

* Field trips can include visiting another building or facility.

** A Code of Safe Work Practices titled - FIELD TRIPS is included at end of this chapter.

See Chapter 11 - CODE OF SAFE WORK PRACTICES for more details.

- **WORKING ON FOOT**

Supervisors shall have pre-job discussions with employees to discuss hazards unique to the job assignment, the hazards associated with working-on-foot, or performing pedestrian type activities, and working near highway traffic.

Supervisors shall talk to employees to improve their awareness of the increasing incident of drug and alcohol impaired drivers on the highways, and instruct them to make periodic visual observations of moving traffic during their work activities.

5.21 Motel, hotel, dining out, and sightseeing safety

Supervisors shall also discuss information about travel status, visiting other cities, and the potential hazards associated with being in a different working environment. Discussions should include personal safety and precautions about motel/hotel safety, dining out, shopping and sightseeing.

NOTE:

National media reports continue to focus attention on employees in both the public and private sector that have become victims of assaults or other forms of violent acts while working. Many of these assaults result in serious injury or fatality, or the threat of injury. It is important that managers, supervisors, and employees are aware of the potential for violence while working and what actions can be taken when an employee is confronted with an act of violence, threat, verbal or personal harassment, or intimidation.

Although limited in information about violence in the workplace, managers, supervisors, and employees are encouraged to review Chapter 6 - WORKPLACE VIOLENCE, for information that may help them understand and/or handle a situation that they may encounter while on travel status.

5.22 Personal clothing

Employees are expected to report to work reasonably dressed to protect themselves during routine assignments and from exposure to usual and/or predictable physical and environmental conditions found in the work place.

Employees shall be given adequate advance notice of field trips so they may properly dress to protect themselves during the new work assignment, and/or be protected from exposure to the conditions in the new assignment.

5.23 Use of seat belts and shoulder harnesses

It is Departmental policy that whenever an employee operates a state-owned, privately-owned, or rented vehicle while on official state business, he/she shall wear a seat belt and shoulder harness. The Departmental policy is based on the California mandatory seat belt law as contained in the California Vehicle Code (CVC) Section 27315(d)(1), which states in part:

“No person shall operate a . . . motor vehicle on a highway unless that person and all passengers . . . are ***properly*** restrained by a safety belt.”
(**Bold type** and *italics* for emphasis.)

This CVC section and Departmental policy means:

The driver or operator of any vehicle shall be responsible to ensure that **all passengers "BUCKLE-UP" before the vehicle is placed into operation.**

5.24 Visiting a construction or maintenance project

Whenever office employees are required to perform any work activity within the limits of a construction or maintenance project, they must contact the project Resident Engineer, or Region Manager before they enter the work zone and begin their work.

The purpose is to advise the engineer-in-charge (Resident Engineer) or maintenance supervisor of the reason for the visit, gain permission to enter the project or work zone and to proceed with their planned work activity.

The person-in-charge, or his/her designee, then can provide a brief orientation about safety hazards on the project and explain any particular operations, such as haul roads and detours that must be observed.

The person-in-charge may deny entry to the project if conditions warrant.

USING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

This section only briefly covers personal protective equipment (PPE) and has been condensed from Chapter 12 - PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE).

See Chapter 12 for specific and detailed information about each type and category of personal protective equipment, and specific Departmental and Cal-OSHA regulations covering the use of personal protective equipment.

5.25 Head protection

All employees are responsible to wear hard hats during any work activity that may expose them to a head injury, and shall always wear a hard hat while working on foot near vehicular traffic.

5.26 Eye and face protection

Employees who are directed to work where there is a risk of contact with flying particles shall be required to wear appropriate eye and face protection.

Employees **shall always wear** safety glasses or goggles while working near moving traffic or in highway work zones.

Employees who wear prescription corrected lenses should be provided with state-furnished safety glasses or goggles to cover their prescription eye glasses.

Only safety glasses that have approved design features of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), standard known as ANSI Z87.1, shall be used. The "Z87.1" logo must be embossed on glasses used by Caltrans employees.

Supervisors may maintain a supply of state-furnished safety glasses or goggles in their offices as conditions warrant. Safety glasses can be obtained from District or Headquarters warehouse stock.

Contact lenses do not provide eye protection. Therefore, employees who wear contact lenses shall wear approved eye protection over their contact lenses if they are required to take a field trip, or work where there is a risk of receiving eye injuries.

5.27 Warning Garments (Vest, Shirt, or Jacket)

Departmental policy requires employees working on foot, and exposed to vehicular or equipment traffic, shall wear warning garments such as vest, coveralls, jacket, or shirt (button or pull-over style). The warning garments must be orange, strong yellow-green, or fluorescent versions of these colors.

- A vest of appropriate color equipped with reflective material is the standard for all Caltrans operations.
- A vest of appropriate color equipped with reflective material worn over white coveralls is required for Caltrans nighttime operations. Coveralls with reflective material conforming to the ANSI/ISEA 107-1999 standard may be used in lieu of the colored reflective vest.

Supervisors shall read Section 12.20 WARNING GARMENTS, in Chapter 12 - PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE), before directing employees to leave the office and work where they may be exposed to vehicular traffic.

Employees should also read and become familiar with these instructions.

5.28 Foot protection

Employees are responsible to furnish their own footwear.

Whenever an employee is directed to leave his/her office and travel to a field work location, his/her normal footwear may not provide adequate foot protection. Before the trip begins, the supervisor and the employee must ensure that the footwear is acceptable for the job which he/she is being assigned and the hazards to which they may be exposed.

If an employee is going to visit a construction or maintenance work zone, he/she should wear a work shoe or boot with soles made of neolite, neoprene, crepe, rubber, or similar material which will retain a nonslip surface when wet, damp, oily, or muddy.

Unacceptable footwear for visiting a construction and/or maintenance work zone are shoes with the following features:

- sandals and slippers
- any type of loose or open weave upper
- footwear with leather soles
- open toes and/or open heels

SPECIAL WORK ACTIVITIES

This section discusses safety tips about how equipment and employees can be used to provide an extra measure of safety while working near vehicular traffic.

5.29 Parking and/or stopping along streets and highways

When parking and/or stopping on the shoulder area of a highway, and the vehicle will not be used as a physical barrier, always park the vehicle as far off the paved shoulder area as possible. Choose a location carefully, so the vehicle will not affect passing traffic, and will not interfere with employee sight distances.

Where possible, park motor vehicles in a manner that will minimize exposure to moving vehicular traffic and provide a physical barrier between employees and any traffic that may enter the work zone.

5.30 Using physical barriers

Whenever employees work on a highway, freeway, or city street, the work should be planned and organized to minimize exposure to moving vehicular traffic.

Employees working on foot near a highway or street should always try to protect themselves from injury by utilizing some type of physical barrier such as a motor vehicle, guardrail, a fence, or other physical barrier.

Where possible, park motor vehicles in a manner that will provide a physical barrier between themselves and any traffic that may enter the work zone.

5.31 Using a lookout

When it is impractical to use barrier vehicles, guardrail or other physical barriers, a person should be assigned to act as a lookout to provide warning from errant vehicles.

A lookout is a person responsible to lookout for approaching vehicular traffic to detect any unusual vehicle movement or errant driver behavior. The exclusive duty of the lookout is to continuously observe oncoming traffic to warn other workers whenever trouble is expected. The lookout assignment should be changed frequently to maintain a high degree of alertness.

5.32 Working in median areas

Employees who regularly work in an office should receive specialized training as to the hazards unique to median work areas, and working adjacent to moving highway traffic prior to working in median areas.

For work performed in a median area, the following precautions shall be taken:

1. Employees should park their vehicles within the median area where crossing the traffic lane on foot is not necessary. Exit the vehicle on the off-traffic side. In narrow medians, exit the vehicle on the side that will present the least exposure.
2. If the vehicle cannot be safely parked within the median area and the traffic lane must be crossed on foot, the following precautions must be taken:
 - (a) Wait for a break in the flow of vehicular traffic in all lanes that will allow you to cross a traffic lane.
 - (b) Do not carry any items or materials in your hands or arms that might hinder your visibility or movement.
 - (c) If the traffic volume is too heavy, wait until it is safe to cross the lanes.
3. If the work cannot be performed as planned due to high traffic volumes, the supervisor shall re-evaluate the work activity to prevent unnecessary exposure of employees to vehicular traffic.

The supervisor should contact the local Maintenance Region office or Construction office for information regarding planned lane closures or construction work in the area.

5.33 Amber warning lights

Section 25256 of the California Vehicle Code (CVC) allows Caltrans vehicles to display flashing/rotating amber warning lights, ". . . when such vehicles are parked or working on the highway."

Amber lights should only be used to alert traffic of workers on foot or operations near the traveled way. Do not use the amber lights while driving, when parked in an established lane closure, or when no danger to the employee exists.

5.34 Night work

Supervisor shall discuss the hazards unique to working at night. If employees will be exposed to vehicular traffic, personal protective equipment including hard hat, eye protection, foot wear, and other (cold-weather, heat stress) clothing shall be discussed and/or required.

Warning garments of appropriate color equipped with reflective material are required whenever working on-foot, within the right-of-way or near vehicular or equipment traffic. See Section 5.27 WARNING GARMENTS (Vest, Shirt, or Jacket) for details.

Employees should be given sufficient advance notice of a night work operation to allow them to adjust their schedules and avoid unnecessary fatigue.

5.35 Hazardous spills

Whenever an employee discovers a spill of an unknown material or substance on a highway or street, the employee should:

1. During regular working hours, call the Maintenance Region Manager's office, if known, or the Caltrans Communications Center, or the California Highway Patrol (CHP), through 9-1-1.
2. Stay clear and "up wind" if possible, and avoid contact with the unidentified material.
3. Provide traffic control, possibly by closing a traffic lane or other traffic controls.
4. Call for assistance and wait for the experts.

If an employee determines that his/her personal safety may be in jeopardy, they should leave the area, and telephone appropriate authorities from another location.

CODE OF SAFE WORK PRACTICES**FIELD TRIPS****PREPARING FOR A FIELD TRIP****PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS****TYPICAL FIELD TRIP HAZARDS:**

1. Adverse weather conditions
2. Slippery roadways
3. Moving vehicular or equipment traffic/traffic congestion
4. Hazardous parking areas
5. Noise
6. Impaired drivers
7. Footing on uneven terrain
8. Poor visibility
9. Contact with flying particles
10. Bending, stooping and lifting objects

SAFE WORK PRACTICES**TYPICAL PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID INJURY:**

1. Review Safety Manual for fieldwork safety items
2. Wear appropriate footwear, hard hat, safety glasses, and warning garments
3. Wear appropriate personal clothing
4. Perform pre-operation inspection on vehicle
5. Bend, stoop, and lift properly
6. Obey traffic laws
7. Be alert for other motorists
8. Stop and/or park vehicle in safe place
9. Exit vehicle properly, away from traffic
10. Avoid backing vehicle if possible
11. Use physical protection from traffic where practicable such as (a vehicle, guardrail, K-rail, etc.)
12. Work facing traffic and/or use lookout
13. Wear hearing protection as required.